

2023 Town Meeting/Town Election Notes

Town of Benton – March 14, 2023

The Town Meeting was called to order at 7:00PM by the Moderator, Gil Richardson. Due to inclement weather, Gil had facilitated a ZOOM link so that SAU 23 School Administrator could attend.

Gil led us through the Pledge of Allegiance. He then asked that we recognize any members, past or present, of the Armed Forces, as well as any First Responders and thank them for their service to our community and country. A round of applause was given to those members. Gil gave tribute as well to all of the folks involved in service to the community such as teachers, medical professionals. At 7:03PM a motion was made to recess to the School District meeting. The motion was seconded, and by voice vote, the Town Meeting was recessed to the School District meeting.

At 7:14PM, the Moderator reconvened the Town Meeting.

ARTICLE 1. Election of Town Officials

To choose persons for the following positions and terms of service:
(Majority vote required)

The following Town Officers were elected after a voice vote:

<u>Position</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expires</u>	
Selectman	3 years	2026	William Darcy
Treasurer	1 year	2024	Dwight Swauger
Town Clerk	1 year	2024	Michael Stiebitz
Tax Collector	1 year	2024	Michael Stiebitz
Supervisor of the Checklist	3 years	2026	Kathy Saffo
Ballot Clerk	1 year	2024	Frances Hadden
Surveyor of Wood and Lumber	1 year	2024	Joseph Boutin, Jr.
Planning Board Member	3 years	2026	Sam Gregory
Trustee of the Trust Funds	3 years	2026	Laura Richardson

ARTICLE 2. Acceptance of Town Reports

To see if the Town will vote to accept the reports of the officers and agents as printed. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made to accept article as written and then seconded.

Chairman Bill Darcy took a moment to mention that a major push for the Selectboard this year is to tackle some of the pressing cemetery problems as reflected in the warrant article later on the agenda. Also important this year is the expected rollout of New Hampshire Electric Coop’s fiber-to-the-home internet service.

The article passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 3. Operating Budget

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$127,475 for General Municipal Operations. This article does not include appropriations contained in special or individual articles addressed separately. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made to accept the article as written, seconded. With no discussion, the article then was passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 4. Add Funds to Revaluation Trust Fund

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$5,000 to be added to the Revaluation Trust Fund, with the funds to come from the Town’s unassigned fund balance. No amount to be raised from taxation. The Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made to accept the article as written, seconded.

Bill Darcy stated that this is the 5th year of the revaluation cycle mandated by the NH Department of Revenue (NHDRA). Its purpose is to realign the property value assessments with current averages. This is done by analyzing recent (over the last two years) Benton real estate sales and then using that data to adjust the rest of the property values. Currently, based upon NHDRA calculations, Benton’s assessments are at 58% of market values. It is likely that every property owner in Benton will see fairly large (in the order of 40%) increases in their assessment. However, since the Town and School budgets will probably remain similar to today’s amounts, the overall Tax Rate should be reduced by a like amount so that most annual tax bills will be comparable to the current bills. Nevertheless, some properties may pay more taxes and some less.

The article then was passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 5. Howe Hill Rd Paving Work

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$40,000 to repave 500 feet of Howe Hill Road and two culverts with the funds to come from the unassigned fund balance. No amount to be raised from taxation. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written.

Bill Darcy explained that while Howe Hill Road needs to be repaved in some sections, the basic roadway is in fairly decent shape. Tunnel Stream Road, on the other hand, has several stretches that are very punishing to vehicles.

The Selectboard therefore proposed the following amended article:

ARTICLE 5 (Amended). Howe Hill Rd and Tunnel Stream Rd Paving Work

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$70,000 for paving portions of Howe Hill Road, including a culvert replacement, and Tunnel Stream Road, with funds to come from the unassigned fund balance. No amount to be raised from taxation. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

He stated that Benton has received quite a bit of NH State money for road maintenance, so it seems to make sense to tackle both areas this year.

The section of Howe Hill Road to be addressed will be from 11 Howe Hill Road up to 64 Howe Hill Road, approximately 650 feet of roadway. The assumption is that this section will require only repaving and not extensive base preparation. A culvert replacement is also included in the Howe Hill Road portion of the project. The proposed section of Tunnel Stream Road will start at the first cross culvert and go to the next cross culvert, approximately 550 feet of roadway. This part of the project will require base preparation as well as paving.

The amended article was then passed by unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 6. Town Hall Property Improvements

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$10,000 for Town Hall improvements including a fence on the side yard and lighted sign and notice board, with the funds to come from the unassigned fund balance. No amount to be raised from taxation. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written.

A question was raised as to what is the purpose and the type of fence being proposed.

Selectboard member Gina Elliott explained that the fence will be installed to protect the septic leach field as well as shielding the propane tank from view. Chain link fencing is not being considered, whereas a split rail type of fence is more what the Selectboard has in mind.

The article was then passed by unanimous voice vote.

Article 7. Cemetery Improvements

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$40,000 for cemetery improvements, including gravestone repairs, with the funds to come from the unassigned fund balance. This special warrant article will be a non-lapsing appropriation per RSA 32:7, VI and will not lapse until the cemetery improvements are completed or by December 31, 2025, whichever is sooner. No amount to be raised from taxation. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made and seconded to accept article as written.

Bill Darcy explained that the reason that the article specifies “non-lapsing” is that we may not be able to spend all the money this year. Several vendors the Selectmen have spoken to are extremely busy and can’t seem to hire additional workers, a common theme of many local employers.

Gina Elliott gave details about an upcoming visit (April 8) by John Lord who will come and lead a hands-on class on how to clean gravestones and offer tips and techniques on things that we can do ourselves to try and restore some of the damaged markers.

In addition, Gina stated that an actual gravestone restoration company will be here for a day in May (TBA) to come and assess our cemetery issues and will then generate quotes for various repairs. She said that the fellow she is in contact with has indicated that he is very willing to work for us on a piecemeal basis.

A question arose as to which cemeteries will be involved. The old section of Mountain View Cemetery will be first to be addressed.

The article was then passed by unanimous voice vote.

Article 8. Add Funds to Highway Capital Reserve Fund

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate \$10,000 to be added to the Highways/Roads Capital Reserve Fund, previously established. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made to accept the article as written, seconded. With no discussion, the article then was passed by unanimous voice vote.

Article 9. Create Bridges Expendable Trust Fund

To see if the town will vote to establish a Bridges Expendable Trust Fund per RSA 31:19-a, for the purpose of maintaining and reconstructing Town-owned bridges and to raise and appropriate \$21,445.86 to put in the fund, with this amount to come from the unassigned fund balance; further to name the Board of Selectmen as agents to expend from said fund. No amount to be raised from taxation. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made to accept the article as written, seconded.

Bill Darcy explained that the peculiar dollar value reflects the actual fund amount that the State of NH gave to the Town, and that the money can only be spent on bridges. This article allows us to segregate the money in order to satisfy the State’s requirement on its usage.

The article then was passed by unanimous voice vote.

Article 10. Revaluation Trust Fund-Designate Select Board as Agents to Expend

To see if the town will vote to name the Board of Selectmen as agents to expend from the previously created Revaluation Trust Fund. Selectmen recommend this article. (Majority vote required)

Motion was made to accept the article as written, seconded.

Bill Darcy explained that the NHDRA believes that the current Revaluation Trust is not an “expendable” trust. A warrant article would be required to spend money from the fund. This article will allow the Selectboard to spend money from the account as needed for revaluation efforts.

The article then was passed by unanimous voice vote.

The Moderator asked for and received a motion and a second to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous voice vote at 7:56 PM. Selectboard member Kim Carpenter administered the oath of office to all the newly elected present.

A true copy,
Attest: Michael P. Stiebitz – Benton Town Clerk

Michael P. Stiebitz - 03/21/2023